



Messing With Media

The theme of Messing With Media is to be situated within mixed-media courses as treated within our community (Sint Lucas' Architecture Department). As such, the research project intends to feed and (re)direct the courses in order to get in line with current graphical phenomena and insights. Architectural graphics figure as a focal point within Messing With Media (from now on referred to as MWM), which, more specifically, is the process of blending digital drawing aids and traditional drawing techniques into integrated mutant media forms. Rather than overstating the theoretical connotations behind architectural representation ¹ and the (r)evolution of Computer Aided Design, the investigations search for practical information and knowledge on contemporary drawing intended for designers in order to (re)define contemporary architectural drawing. The main subject concerns 'designerly drawing', though excursions outside the field of architecture will not be excluded.



When fifteenth century renaissance architects shifted their attention from constructing buildings to architecture as an intellectual activity, architects turned to drawing as a means to communicate and direct building activities. As a consequence fifteenth century artists reinvented themselves as draughtsmen rather than as master masons. For over 200 years architects, mathematicians, painters and universalists studied and refined the drawing methods (projections, perspective theories, curvilinear theories, triangulations, anamorphosis,...). Those studies and refinements eventually culminated in an architectural drawing system. A practical and normalized set of rules and tools architects could follow in visualizing their ideas for clients, contractors, engineers, etc. At the wake of the twentieth century industrial and technological innovations, within specifically the graphical and printing industry, followed each other rapidly and began to shake century old graphical traditions. Artists and designers constantly researched the possibilities of the innovations which again started to change the structure and organisation of many artists' working spaces. Not before long the graphical changes also started to infiltrate the architects' studios. Where as architects used to design around big drawing boards producing unique artifacts², the introduction of innovative architectural drawing aids changed design-production drastically. The development of more economical printing processes helped to speed up drawing processes and new and affordable media helped to spread new ideas widely. Technological novelties started to proliferate: blueprints through contact printing, photomontages through offset-printing, copy-machines, faxes and eventually computers. Computers remodelled our whole society to the extent that living without them has become unimaginable for most of us. Digitalization flip-flopped professional relationships drastically and attempted to ease life for everyone.



MWM questions digitallization. Digital novelties are hyped as tools that send the very traditions which gave birth to the new technology to oblivion and beyond. The novelties are being branded as equal tools augmented with controllable parameters, ever faster, more performing and ultimately of a level higher. If we find ourselves claiming that the digital version of a traditional process will produce 'better results', we must remember that digital painting, for example, is quite simply a different medium than an oil painting on wood. From a representational point of view, different media can be alike –it's about a subject being represented-, but from a practical point of view, the two are completely different tools with inherent logics and qualities. Is it defensible to state that traditional drawing skills are to be discarded in favour of their digital counterparts? Is there actually anyone who believes laptops are the sole and only designing tools for the future?

MWM asserts that the gradual infusion of digital tools within our practices creates a fuzzy relationship between tradition and novelty. From this assertion *MWM* assumes that designers and draughtsmen create a series of possible alliances between newly introduced digital novelties and already embodied techniques. As such, draughtsmen mix and blend different media-types to produce mutated media-types. *MWM* intends to study those blending processes from within. To do that *MWM* "infiltrates" a variety of design-processes to analyse the graphical tools which have been abused, during the designing process, in order to get a scope of graphical methods which found their way to practices. Tracing the steps towards the design of an architectural project means we have to acknowledge the unique-ness of that process. Designing is considered as a non-linear-activity which is ruled by different actors and their properties which altogether influence the final outcome architectural projects. Schematically, one can designate



three actors: the architectural subject, the designer and the “client”. On the level of the architectural subject, one can agree that spatial ideas/design questions call for specific media strategies. Be it designing cities, apartment blocks, rows of houses, construction detailing, a villa, a table, a dinner set and so on. Every object and scale has an inherent internal logic towards a representational strategy governing the final outcome of the final architectural presentation. Our second actor -the designer- is solely responsible for the final outcome of our graphical blending process. Design-teams design, draw and direct the production process of our architectural subject. With our designer comes personality, signature, form, volumetric approaches, designerly-concepts, office-organisation and so on. These secondary, subjective designing-properties are governed by the designer’s personal trajects and intrests and compel designs towards unique architectural solutions. Finally, juxtaposed to our designer, there is the person or entity whom we are communicating to: our “client”. And our “client” has many hats: contractor, technician, craftsman, scientist, user, functionary, anyone... Their unique-ness calls for different graphical linguistics. Needless to say that our “client” arranges the architectural subject and ultimately directs our designer towards a communal goal. Departing from previous schematic description of actors and properties governing designs, *MWM* focusses on the graphical language of embryonic design stages. The embryonic is considered as the preliminary intellectual phase where design-studios are pregnant with creativity, where the designing trajectory and the final outcome of the project is an undesignated cerebral figure and working spaces are filled with conceptual debris concerning the architectonic qualities of an achitectural subject yet to be conceived: sketches, pictures, printouts, models, plans, texts, references, whatever nourishes designers in the designing of architectural subjects. On a timetable,



MWM investigates the narrow stretch of undesignated design within a process towards building and is specifically looking for the “graphical in-between”, i.e. drawings forged somewhere on a thin line between analogue and digital activities.

MWM is aware of the fact that “media-blending” indicates a time-tied phenomenon, depending on the unpredictable forces new media insertions bring to the scope. The innovative drive of digital technologies is a constant factor for change, so are the draughtsman’s intentions with any (new) technology. Any new drawing environment introduces unforeseen possibilities and fusions for designerly drawing and pushes (architectural-) drawing into a constant state of adaptation and the adaptation works in two directions: analogue activities adapt to digital possibilities and vice versa. *MWM* specifically searches for drawing techniques which have already found their way into our designerly acts. That, in order to see how certain techniques graft themselves onto already incorporated drawing methods to become an integral part of the individualized set of drawing tools designers call for while conceptualizing their architectural subjects.

MWM studies interactions between different media-possibilities through analyzing sketches, drawings and media from different surroundings (design offices, architects, draughtsmen, students, artists, publications, movies...) in order to map contemporary modes of graphical representation. The idea is to analyse these modes and put them into a drawing “perspective” and translate the study into an annotated drawing manual serving as graphical research. Ultimately, the findings can be used as reference material within our courses and our thinking on new directions for representational courses³. *MWM* -studying contemporary drawing techniques- can provide



us with knowledge of valuable methods, tools, insights and what not to implement in graphical education and beyond. If drawing finds itself in a state of adaptation, constantly reinventing itself through the crossbreeding with cutting edge media aids, we should embrace this state as being a contemporary way of drawing and analyzing some of the opportunities this so-called hybrid ⁴ state presents to us in order to get in line with ongoing graphical developments. Designing spaces - and the representational language that comes with that act - incorporates a tacit understanding of spatiality which is visualized through a graphical language serving the intended spatiality. For too long architectural representation has been treated as a minimum set of rules and/or media modes with strict divisions between analogue and digital, geometry and morphology, pictorial and abstract and so on. Within contemporary practices, fast-design communication is the main concern, by any means necessary. Within the designing process designers do not consciously draw borders between the different media modes. They stack mode upon mode to suit swift design representations. The artificial schisms towards our representational modes may be close to non-existing. *MWM* sincerely hopes the study can contribute to an alternative, individual training model for architectural representation. A trajectory in which one can discover certain ways to express creative thoughts and pick a few out for a personal pleasure and, more importantly, their communicative performance.

MWM is considered as a public space that serves a wider community. Texts, images, movies, interviews, features will serve as a pool of information to draw from. One can read the study in many directions: for the sheer inspiration of it, graphical knowledge, practical tools and eventually pedagogical goals. Exhibitions, workshops, web-



information, happenings and presentations in “zine”-publications will inform a wider public on the proceedings. The studies are equally meant for practitioners, students and tutors. The main concern is to present an inside view of the working methods designers and offices have created for themselves in order to generate new insights and new possibilities to talk about architecture, graphically. As already stated, the research should offer a praxis-based background to rework our representational training. Since little or no material is to be found on the subject of mixing designerly media-systems, the inquiries should provide working tools that can be implemented in our representational curriculum. The aim is to redirect views on analogue, digital and morphological courses into an integrated volume of representational possibilities based on equality. Within this model, the final representation of our previous “architectural subject” should be our main concern. As *MWM* is intended to function as designerly research, the study will be larded with examples from architect’s practices, approaches and examples from other architectural/design schools, artists’ presentations, literature and other topics covering contemporary mixed media modes in order to provide valuable information on contemporary architectonic graphics.

MWM - intentions - november 2007

(1) Defining representation is study on itself, I would like to refer to Dalibor Vasely's "architecture in the age of divided representation" where representation is tackled on page 13: *«The problem of representation is closely linked with the process of making (poiesis) and with creative imitation (mimēsis). Each project, however small or unimportant, begins with a program—or at least a vision of the anticipated result. Such a program or a vision is formed in the space of experience and knowledge available to each of us. The result can be seen as the single actualisation of an infinite number of possibilities. The formation of the program can be modified or improved through words or drawings because they make the potential field of possibilities present and available. Under such conditions, the actual result becomes a representation of the latent possibilities, bringing into focus their typical characteristics and enhancing their presence. Such focus takes place each time we succeed in grasping what is essential to a performance space, a concert hall, a particular urban space, and so on in a project. Thus, as Hans-Georg Gadamer points out, in contrast to the conventional understanding, "representation does not imply that something merely stands in for something else as if it were a replacement or substitute that enjoys a less authentic, more indirect kind of existence. On the contrary what is represented is itself present in the only way available to it."»*

"Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation", Dalibor Vasely, MIT-press, London-Massachusetts, 2004

(2) the idea of (architectural) artifacts is a concept borrowed from "Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge" where the writers state that architects do not "make" buildings, but, rather than that, they make mediating artifacts that make significant buildings possible.

"Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge", Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier, MIT Press, Cambridge/London, 1997

For a view on disappearing drawing aids I refer to "tools of the imagination (drawing tools and technologies from 18th century to present)", Susan C. Piédmont-Palladino, Princeton, New York, 2007

(3) Our Architecture Department is currently studying a transformation of the representational courses wherein all representational courses would be integrated in a «mixed-media» course.

(4) see "Hybrid Drawing Techniques by Contemporary Architects and Designers", M. Saleh Udden, John Wiley and Sons, New York, 1999

Thanks to Marc Godts, Thierry Lagrange, Arnaud Hendrickx, Michiel Helbig, Nel Janssens and Mounia Kalāi for critical support.
All drawings and images provided by Sint Lucas' bachelor-students, thanks and good luck. ®

